

VLOOKUP Formula PDF Cheat Sheet

Exact-match patterns, locked references, cross-sheet formulas, MATCH-based return columns and review checks for Excel workbooks.

Use this sheet as a reminder, not as proof that a workbook is correct.

Replace example ranges, verify the key column, test missing and duplicate values, and review the result against source rows.

Quick syntax

VLOOKUP(lookup_value, table_array, col_index_num, [range_lookup])

Argument	Meaning	Control question
lookup_value	The code or value to find.	Is it a stable business key?
table_array	The source table. Its first column must contain the key.	Is the range locked and complete?
col_index_num	The numbered column to return.	Could inserting a column change it?
range_lookup	FALSE for exact match; TRUE/omitted for approximate match.	Are approximate-match rules deliberate and tested?

1. Exact-match VLOOKUP

=VLOOKUP(A2, Master!\$A\$2:\$D\$500, 4, FALSE)

Use for employee codes, invoice numbers, serial numbers and other identifiers. FALSE is essential for an exact match.

2. Visible missing-record message

=IFERROR(VLOOKUP(A2, Master!\$A\$2:\$D\$500, 4, FALSE), "Not found")

A visible message supports review. Avoid returning an empty string when missing records must be investigated.

3. Cross-workbook lookup

=IFERROR(VLOOKUP(A2, '[Employee Master.xlsx]Active'!\$A\$2:\$F\$500, 6, FALSE), "Missing")

External links can break when files move. Use managed locations and review the path before distribution.

4. Dynamic return column with MATCH

=IFERROR(VLOOKUP(\$A2, Master!\$A\$1:\$F\$500, MATCH(B\$1, Master!\$A\$1:\$F\$1, 0), FALSE), "Not found")

MATCH finds the requested header, reducing dependence on a manually typed return-column number.

5. Two-way missing-record check

=IF(COUNTIF(SourceB!\$A:\$A, A2)=0, "Missing in B", "Present")

Run the reverse check from Source B to Source A as well. One direction cannot reveal every exception.

6. XLOOKUP alternative

```
=XLOOKUP(A2, Master!$A$2:$A$500, Master!$D$2:$D$500, "Not found", 0)
```

Where supported, XLOOKUP separates lookup and return ranges and avoids a numeric return index.

Exact-match review checklist

Check	What to verify
Key	Identify the field that should uniquely identify one record. Check blanks and duplicates before trusting a lookup.
Range	Confirm that the source table begins with the key column and includes the intended return field.
Locks	Use dollar signs for ranges that must not move when formulas are copied.
Match mode	Use FALSE for identifiers unless approximate matching is explicitly required and the source is sorted correctly.
Missing cases	Test a deliberately absent key and ensure the result is visible to the reviewer.
Duplicate cases	Add or locate a duplicate key in a test copy. A single returned value does not prove uniqueness.
Data types	Check numbers stored as text, dates, leading zeros, extra spaces and non-printing characters.
Ownership	Document the source date, business owner, formula purpose and last review date.

Common warning signs

#REF!: A referenced range or column no longer exists.

#N/A: The key was not found, or data types/spacing differ.

Approximate match: TRUE or an omitted fourth argument can return a nearby value rather than the requested identifier.

Hard-coded column index: Inserting columns may silently change which field is returned.

Whole-column ranges: Thousands of repeated formulas can calculate more cells than necessary.

External workbook link: The result can depend on a file path and access that another user does not have.

When to use reconciliation instead

Use a lookup when one controlled key should return one controlled value. Use reconciliation when you need missing-in-each-source results, duplicate groups, field conflicts, multi-source comparison, manual resolutions, exports or an audit trail. Formula output can support a control, but it does not replace a complete exception workflow.

Related ReconNimble tools

Formula Generator: build deterministic Excel or Google Sheets formulas from explicit inputs.

Formula Health Checker: review pasted formulas and XLSX formula cells for structural risks.

Compare Two Spreadsheets: classify matched, missing, duplicate and conflicting records by key.

Reconcile: map fields, run exact/normalized/fuzzy comparison and export audit evidence.

Testing note: The formulas were checked against ReconNimble deterministic fixtures. Excel behaviour can differ by version, locale, workbook structure and data type. Test on a copy of the real workbook before relying on the result.

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